

# The Little Swift *Apus affinis* in Madagascar

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A Madagascar, le Martinet des maisons *Apus affinis* n'est connu que d'un spécimen du 19<sup>ème</sup> siècle et par quelques observations de 2–5 oiseaux de septembre 1989 à novembre 1991. Fin octobre 1998, l'auteur a observé à deux reprises un couple de cette espèce effectuant la parade à ailes relevées, à Antananarivo. Les oiseaux semblaient passer la nuit ou nicher dans les environs, mais aucune observation directe d'oiseaux entrant dans une cavité propice n'a été faite. La ville possède de nombreux sites favorables à la nidification de l'espèce.

Until recently, the status of the Little Swift *Apus affinis* in Madagascar has been unclear. It was first recorded by M Bojer based on a bird captured on the west coast in 1824<sup>1</sup>. However, in the absence of subsequent observations of this easily identified swift, its inclusion in the avifauna of Madagascar was questioned<sup>2,3</sup>. Its status was recently reviewed<sup>4</sup> and sight records of 2–5 individuals on three occasions during September 1989–November 1991 appeared to confirm its presence, at least in small numbers, in Madagascar. Morris & Hawkins<sup>5</sup> report that sightings over Antananarivo have been regular since 1987 and that other records come from Mt. Amber, with most in September–October. I report here an additional sighting, in October 1998, and possible indication of breeding.

At dusk on 24 October 1998 and again during 07.00–07.30 hrs on 25 October, I saw two Little Swifts circling low over the city of Antananarivo, Madagascar. On both occasions, observations were made from a balcony at the rear of the Hotel Colbert in the city centre. The swifts circled low over buildings c200 m away in the same manner these swifts use when preparing to enter or leave a nocturnal roost (pers. obs.). Clear views with 8x binoculars of the white rump, and square, unforked, tail left no doubt as to

the identity of the birds. M Thompson (pers. comm.) independently identified the birds as this species. The two birds often flew near each other and on several occasions gave the gliding raised wing courtship 'v-display' that has previously been recorded for this species<sup>1</sup>. This suggests these birds were a pair and probably nesting or about to nest nearby. Non-breeding birds or casual visitors to the area would not have given the v-display. What was probably the same pair was seen again at dusk on 30 October 1998, from the same vantage, and again appeared to be roosting in this area. On both occasions, the distance and light conditions precluded observation of the birds actually entering a roost / nest site.

These observations supplement earlier sight observations of the species in Madagascar<sup>3</sup> and support its inclusion in the island's resident avifauna. Little Swift regularly utilises man-made structures for nesting, and the abundance of suitable sites in the area of observation suggests that their numbers may increase in the future. ☞

## References

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